

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



FARMERS' BULLETIN



Has been rev.
--see rev.ed.
binders at
end of file.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

667

MAY 22, 1915.

Contributions from the Bureau of Animal Industry, A. D. Melvin, Chief.

BREAKING AND TRAINING COLTS.

By V. G. STAMBAUGH, *Animal Husbandry Division.*

INTRODUCTION.

The breaking and training of colts is of prime importance, because their future value and usefulness depends to a great extent on whether or not they are well broken. By a broken colt is meant one that is safe to handle in the stable or on the road and that will promptly obey the orders of the driver or rider.

Memory and habit are the two main factors with which we have to deal in training horses. A horse acts through instinct and habit, and one of its greatest characteristics is uniformity of conduct. What a horse is once trained to do he will nearly always do under like conditions.

The first thing in training a horse is to get his attention. The second is to make him understand what is wanted. The education of the horse is based on reward and punishment. The reward, a pat on the neck, etc., should immediately follow the act of obedience. The punishment, to be effective, must immediately follow the act of disobedience.

Few horses are inherently vicious. Many horses are made vicious and unreliable by the carelessness or unnecessary brutality of their trainers. If a horse kicks because the harness hurts him, or shies at something of which he is afraid, punishment is not justifiable. If, however, after being stopped, a horse starts before receiving the command to do so, he should be punished. Horses are naturally obedient, and when thoroughly trained their conduct is uniformly good.

A horse should be trained so that he thinks there is no limit to his power to do the things required of him, and believes that he has no power to do that which is against the wishes of his driver. Above all, never ask of a horse something he is unable to perform and then punish him because it can not be done. If during the first year of his work a colt is hitched only to loads that he can pull, he will develop into a good work horse, while if he is overloaded a few times he may become balky and worthless.

All horses can not be treated alike. A high-strung, sensitive horse must be treated gently, the dullard sharply. The same force applied to the sensitive horse that is necessary to make the dullard act would be likely to cause the high-strung horse to rebel, while gentleness would obtain obedience.

To train horses successfully a man needs to exercise great patience, gentleness, and firmness. If you are training a horse and lose your temper, you had better put the horse into the stable until the next day, for further work at this time will be worse than useless and may undo the work already done.

AGE TO BREAK.

Horses are broken at ages ranging from weanlings to old horses. The instincts in a horse which are opposed to obedience to man increase in strength with age. This accounts for the difficulty encountered in handling range horses that are allowed their freedom until their instinct of independence is so strongly developed that it is proportionately difficult to teach them that it is their duty to obey some force other than their own instinct.

FIRST STEPS IN BREAKING.

It is a great advantage to begin the education of the colt as early as possible. The plan generally followed is to break the colt to being led and handled before it is weaned, and to break to harness between the ages of 2 and 3 years. Colts should not do heavy work until they are 4 years old, and should be accustomed to it gradually.

Before a colt is broken to being led it should be taught to stand tied; this applies to unbroken horses of all ages. To do this, put a strong halter on the colt; then take a rope about 14 feet long, double it, putting the loop under the horse's tail as a crupper, twist the two ropes together about three times, then let one rope come forward on each side of the horse, and tie the ends together in front against the chest just tight enough so that it will not drop down; then run a surcingle loosely around the horse behind the withers, tying into it the crupper rope at both sides. Have an additional rope about 12 feet long, run it through the halter ring, and tie it at the breast to the rope that forms the crupper. Tie the other end of the rope to a solid post, allowing about 3 feet of slack. (See fig. 1.) Leave the colt tied for an hour. Another method is to have a loop in one end of the rope, run the lead strap through this loop, and tie it with a little slack to the rope that forms the crupper, the other end of the additional rope, of course, being tied to a solid post.

GENTLING THE COLT.

While tied the colt should be gentled and accustomed to being handled on both sides, on the hind parts, and on the legs. To do this,

hold the headstall in one hand and with the other hand gentle (that is, pet and rub) the colt, first on the neck and head, then on the back and sides, and last on the legs.

To gentle the hind parts take a stick about 4 feet long, wrap a gunny sack around one end, and tie it. Allow the colt to examine it with his nose. Then rub it all over his body.

With this arrangement the colt's hind legs may be rubbed without placing one's self in danger of his heels. If he kicks at it do not hit him, but allow him to examine it again, and proceed as before. This lesson should continue until the colt will stand being approached from either side and rubbed all over. The second day he may be tied

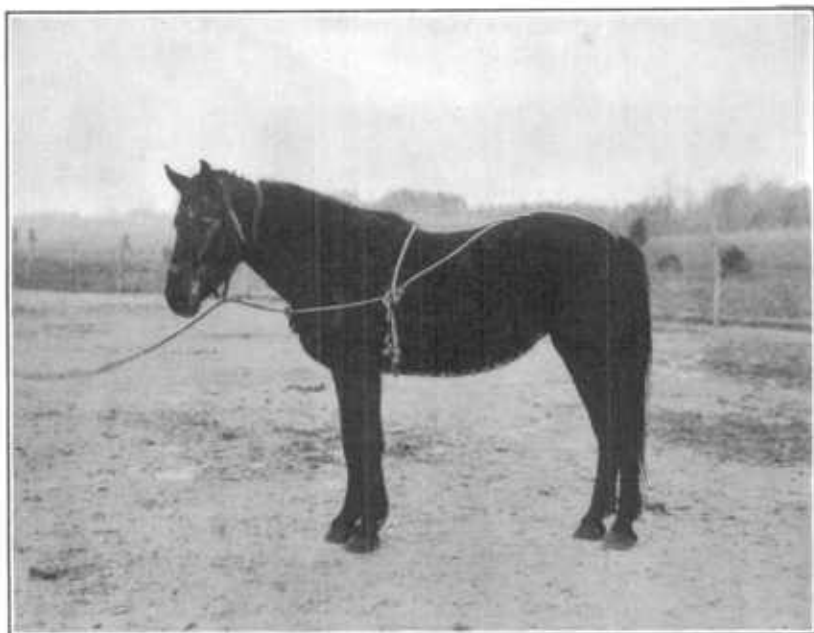


FIG. 1.—Arrangement of halter and ropes for breaking a colt to stand tied and to lead.

up again and further gentled with sacks, blankets, and noises until he has no fear of them around him, under him, or upon him.

Another method of gentling a horse is to tie the halter rope to the tail, as shown in figure 2. This forces him to go in a circle. When he gives in and stands quietly he may be harnessed, saddled, mounted, accustomed to strange sights and sounds, and handled with safety. This is one of the best aids in use in gaining a horse's submission.

BREAKING TO LEAD.

The horse is now ready to lead. Loosen the rope from the post, step off from the horse, and tell him to "come," following the command with a pull on the rope. As soon as the horse advances pet him,

then step away and repeat. He will soon follow without the pull on the rope. Half an hour's leading and this lesson is over.

The next day the crupper should be put on at the beginning of the lesson, but should be discarded after a short work-out and the halter alone used so that the colt will not depend on the crupper rope. These lessons should be continued until the colt leads satisfactorily. If a colt is still running with his mother, it is a good idea, as soon as he is broken to lead, to tie his halter rope to the mother's trace if she is being worked. The tie should be made at about the union of

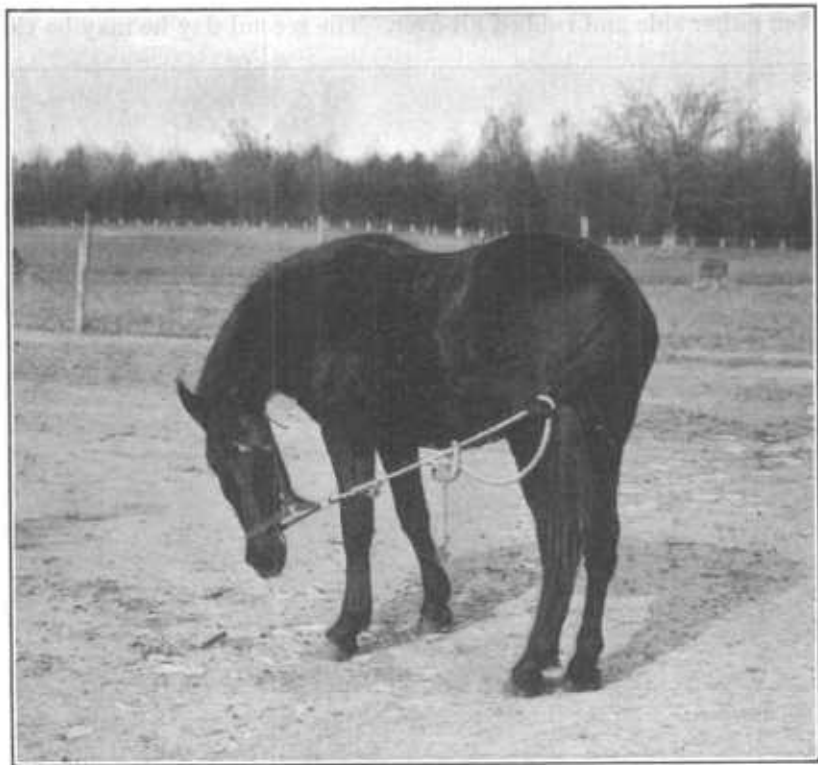


FIG. 2.—One method of gentling a colt.

the backband and the trace and short enough to prevent the colt from getting in front of the team. This will acquaint him with the general conditions and noises pertaining to work, and on account of the mother being so near he will soon become familiar with such surroundings and lose his fear of them.

To break to lead without crupper ropes use a strong halter with a lead rope. Step back about 6 feet from the colt, opposite his shoulders, cluck to him, and pull on the rope. The colt will be forced to take a couple of steps; reward him; cross in front to a similar position on the other side and repeat the command with a pull. Con-

tinue the lesson until the colt follows. Never pull straight ahead on the colt; he can outpull you. Use diplomacy rather than force.

HANDLING AND TRIMMING A HORSE'S FEET.

If the owner will accustom a colt to having his feet handled at the same time he is broken to lead—that is, before he is weaned—much future work and trouble will be avoided. Untrimmed hoofs usually grow long and uneven, and a crooked foot, or worse, a crooked leg, is the result. Failure to regulate the length and bearing of the foot may make a straight leg crooked or a crooked leg worse, while intelligent care during the growing period can greatly improve a leg that is crooked at birth. If horses' feet were properly cared for, there would be fewer knock-kneed, bow-legged, pigeon-toed, cow-hocked, interfering, and paddling horses.

When picking up a colt's foot teach him to stand on three legs, and not to depend on the one holding up his foot for the fourth point of support. When handling a colt's feet begin with the near front foot. Tie a rope around the pastern, grasp the rope close to the foot, push gently against the shoulder, and quickly lift the foot. The lifting of the foot must be simultaneous with the weight shifting to the other feet. Gentle the foot and leg and let it down. Repeat several times and then trim and level the hoof.

To raise a hind foot, put on a rope as on the front foot and draw the foot forward. To put a rope on the hind foot of a wild horse, tie up a front foot, have the assistant hold his hand over the eye on the same side as the foot to be lifted, or take the headstall in one hand, the tail in the other, and whirl the horse until he becomes dizzy. While in this condition he may be handled with safety. Lift the foot forward two or three time and gentle it. As soon as the horse gives in, carry the foot backward into a shoeing position and trim the hoof.

To handle the feet of a horse that will not stand still, or that kicks, a halter twitch is a great aid. (See Fig. 3.) This twitch is easily applied and needs only the ordinary halter and tie rope. Pass the rope over the horse's head just behind the ears; raise the upper lip and put the rope across the gums above the teeth; run the rope through the loop made by passing the rope over the horse's head. The rope should be tight from the halter ring, over the head, under the lip, and through the loop. A few good pulls on this rope should make the horse stand quietly.

For a kicker try the following: Buckle a strap with a 2-inch ring around hind pastern, run a rope through this ring and carry end up over horse's back, tie to opposite foreleg next to the body, and lead the horse forward. When he lifts his foot it may be held up by pulling on the loose end of the rope, as shown in figure 4. The foot may

be held either forward or backward with this arrangement. (See also fig. 5.) The best time to work on a horse's feet is when he is tired from a drive or other exercise.

BREAKING TO DRIVE.

After the colt has been broken to lead he may be accustomed to harness and trained to rein. A horse should never be hitched to a wagon or ridden before he is broken to drive in harness; that is, trained to go at command, stop when he hears "whoa," rein to the right and left, and to back up.

To familiarize the colt with bit and harness the "bitting harness," consisting of an open bridle with snaffle bit, check and side reins, and

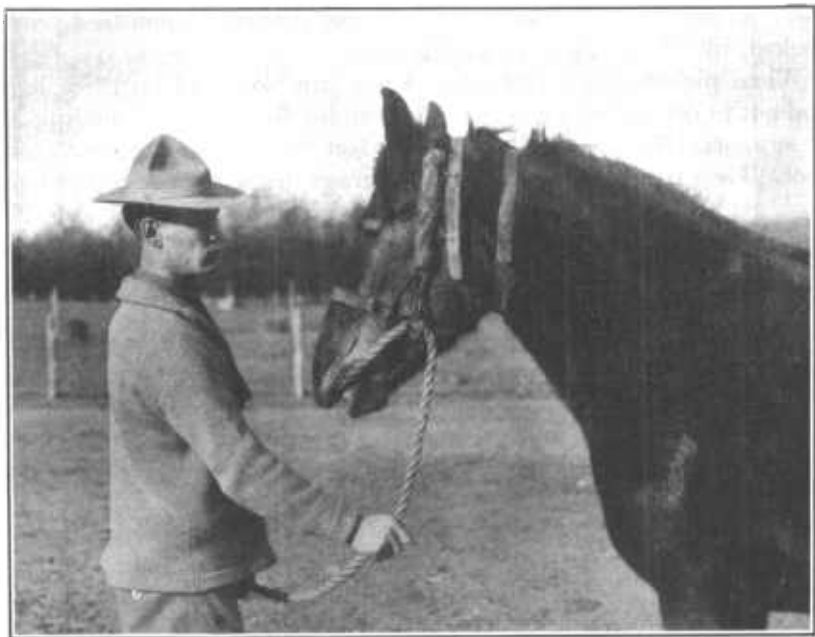


FIG. 3.—Halter twitch.

surcingle with crupper, may be used. The bitting harness is shown in figure 6.

Put the rigging on the colt, leaving the side and check reins comparatively loose, and turn him loose in a small paddock for an hour. On the second lesson the reins may be tightened somewhat, but not left on for over an hour. The third day driving lines may be put on. Let the assistant lead the colt till he is not frightened at the driver walking behind. Dismiss the assistant as soon as possible, and drive the colt for half an hour in a quiet paddock or lane where he will not see other horses. All that should be taught in this lesson is to go ahead. Cluck to the colt, or tell him "get up," and use the whip to let him know what is meant.

It is essential to train both sides of a colt. He may become accustomed to objects seen on the near side with the near eye, but when the same objects are viewed for the first time on the other side with the off eye he may be badly frightened. Driving in a right and left circle will facilitate this training.

TO STOP A HORSE—"WHOA."

The next lesson should be a short review of the previous work and in addition the meaning of "whoa." "Whoa" in horse training is the big word. It doesn't mean back or steady, but stop. Train the

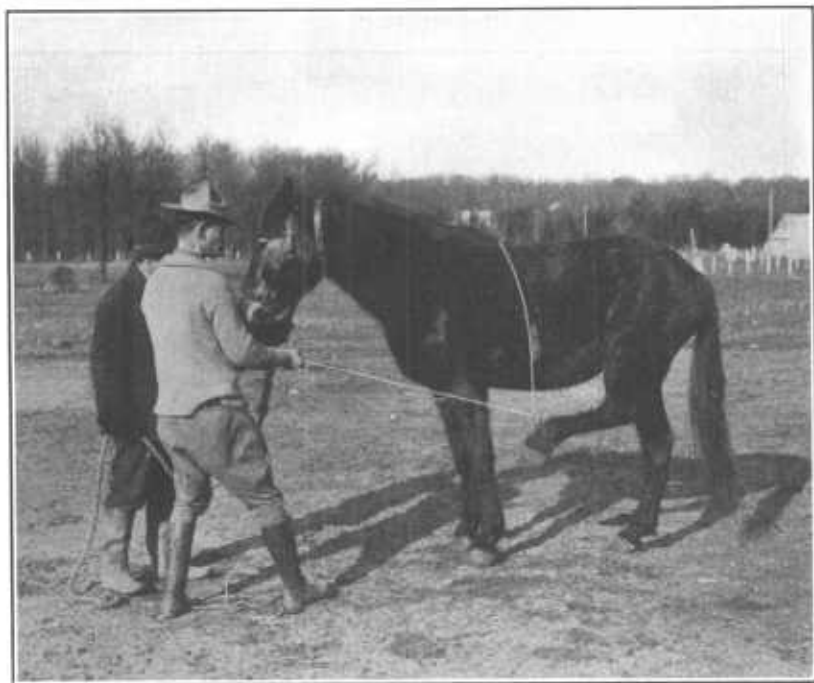


FIG. 4.—Raising the hind foot.

horse so that when he hears "whoa" he will stop and stay stopped no matter what is happening.

To stop a horse say "whoa" so that he hears you plainly, and immediately follow the command with a pull on the reins. The most effective use of the reins is to hold one rein just tight and give a good reef or pull on the other one, then relax the pressure. If the horse doesn't stop, repeat the command and pull. Soon he will stop at the word, and the pull may be eliminated.

TO BACK A HORSE—"BACK."

The next lesson should review "get up" and "whoa," and the horse should be taught to back. As a horse should be trained to stop on command, so should he back on the word, and lugging on the lines should be unnecessary.

Drive the horse a few steps to get his attention, stop him, then give the command "back," following it with a good reef on the reins. If he yields a step, pet him, and then repeat the command with the pull on the reins. Do not exert a continuous pressure, for if this is done the horse will take the bit and forge ahead. Do not make the lesson too long. Repeat again the next day, and continue lessons until the horse will back on command.

After the horse goes satisfactorily in biting rig, the work harness with breeching should be substituted. The traces and breeching should be joined loosely together and gradually tightened as the work progresses. This will familiarize the colt with the sensation

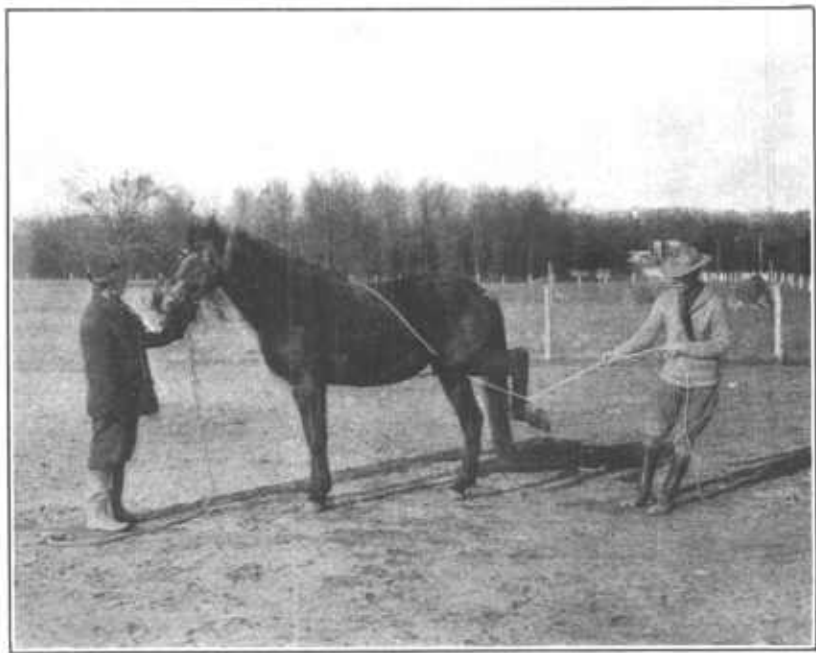


FIG. 5.—Holding foot for shoeing.

of wearing collar and breeching. As soon as he goes well with the harness he is ready to be hitched to the wagon or cart, single or double.

DRIVING DOUBLE.

To drive double use a broken gentle horse for a team mate, preferably one that the colt knows. Hitch them together and drive around without the wagon, stopping, starting, and backing the team. Thirty minutes should suffice for this lesson.

At the next lesson familiarize the colt with the wagon; lead him up to it, allowing him to smell it. Then rattle the wagon and lead him around it; lead the gentle horse to its place at the tongue, bring the colt up, attach the lines, the neck yoke, and lastly the traces.

Hitch the two together. The assistant may now take the colt's lead rope. Drive a few steps and stop, using the brake to prevent the wagon from running up on the team. Let the assistant pet the colt until he quiets down, then start again, going a little farther. As soon as the colt gets over his fear drive around in a circle a few times. Stop occasionally and always quiet the colt. Circle in the opposite direction. When the colt goes quietly the assistant may get in the wagon. Have a short stay chain on the old horse so that if necessary he may start the wagon alone. After the colt goes well a short drive may be taken. Always stop when the colt shows fear of something. Let him look it over and examine it; never whip him or rush by

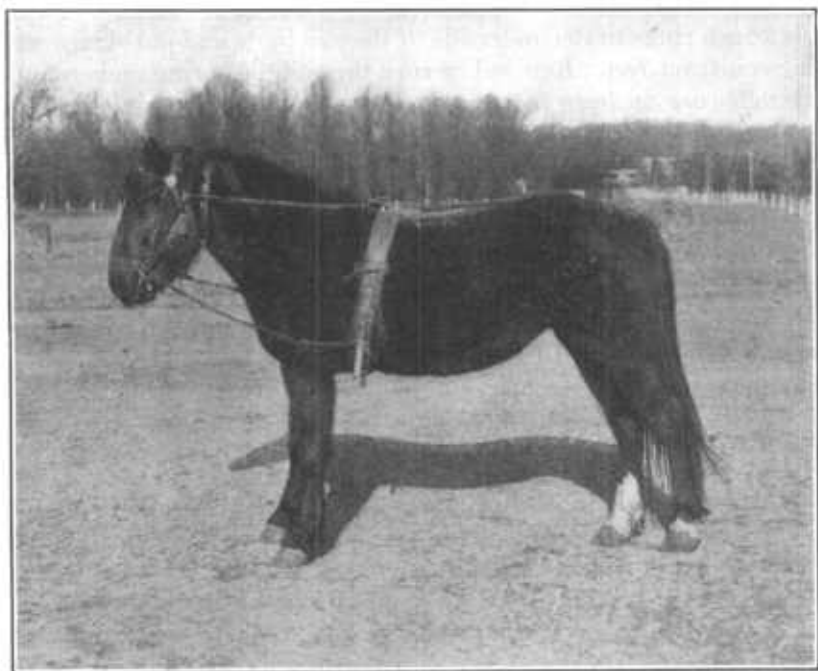


FIG. 6.—Bitting harness.

anything at which he is frightened; otherwise a shying horse will result. The daily drive may be increased in length until the colt is broken.

CITY SIGHTS.

Before the colt is driven in the city or on a road where there is heavy traffic he should be accustomed to such sights and sounds as will be encountered there. If a railroad track is near, where trains pass frequently, or a road with automobile traffic, or a traction engine in action, put on the leading ropes and tie the colt near. As soon as he loses his fear of such sights and sounds at a distance he should be led up to them if possible and allowed to make an examination. When he finds that they do not hurt him he loses his fear and may then be driven on busy roads and streets.

DRIVING SINGLE.

Put single harness on the colt, using an open bridle. Lead him to the rig and allow him to examine it. A two-wheeled breaking cart with long shafts is usually used. Let the assistant draw the rig around the colt a few times, or until the colt does not shy at it; then raise the shafts and draw the rig into place. If the colt is one that you think may kick or try to run, put on the trip ropes. (Fig. 7.)

Some horses are confirmed kickers, runaways, or otherwise unsafe to handle with the ordinary appliances. With trip ropes such horses may be handled with safety and cured of many bad habits. To put on trip ropes a strong surcingle, four 2-inch iron rings, two straps to go around pasterns, and a rope about 25 feet long are needed. Fasten two 2-inch rings to the underside of the surcingle and put straps with rings on front feet. Run end of rope through near ring on surcingle, through ring on near foot, up and through off side surcingle ring, down, and tie to off fore foot. A pull on the rope when the horse steps will bring him to his knees. This appliance may also be used to teach a horse the meaning of "whoa." Always use knee pads or have the horse on soft ground, where he will not injure his knees.

When the colt is hitched the driver should get in the rig and have the assistant lead the colt. Start him quietly, drive a few steps, stop and pet him. Repeat until he starts and stops the rig without becoming frightened. Dismiss your assistant as soon as possible so that the colt's attention may not be divided between two authorities. Before the colt is driven on busy highways he should be "city broke."

BREAKING TO RIDE.

When a horse is to be used for riding it is well first to break him to drive single and double. This will make him quieter to ride.

Horses usually buck through fear. In breaking one to ride, take plenty of time and do not frighten him. Put on the saddle and lead him around until he becomes accustomed to it. Do not have the girth too tight. The horse may be tied up for a time and later turned into a paddock with the saddle on.

Next accustom the horse to being mounted, getting on and off a number of times. (See Fig. 8.) The assistant should have a lead rope tied around the horse's neck and run through the rings of a snaffle bit. If the horse attempts to play up, punish him with a jerk on the bit. Let the assistant lead the horse with rider around until the horse is familiar with the weight on his back, then dismiss the assistant. If the horse becomes rebellious, pull his head sharply to one side; do not let him get it down. The first few rides should be in a small inclosure.

The gaits should be taught separately. The first few rides should be the walk; next teach the trot, and then the canter. Spurs should

not be used until the horse is well broken. Most saddle horses can be taught to rack. To teach a horse to rack, he should be shod with light shoes or none at all in front and heavy shoes behind. Sitting well back in the saddle, just force the horse out of a walk and he will soon rack. Keep him at it for only a short distance at a time, as it is a new gait to him and tiresome at first. After the gait is learned the duration of the lesson may be gradually lengthened.

SUGGESTIONS.

In the preceding instructions principal emphasis has been laid on kindness to the horse. In reality the whip is of equal importance with kindness. To be submissive to a man's will, the horse must fear

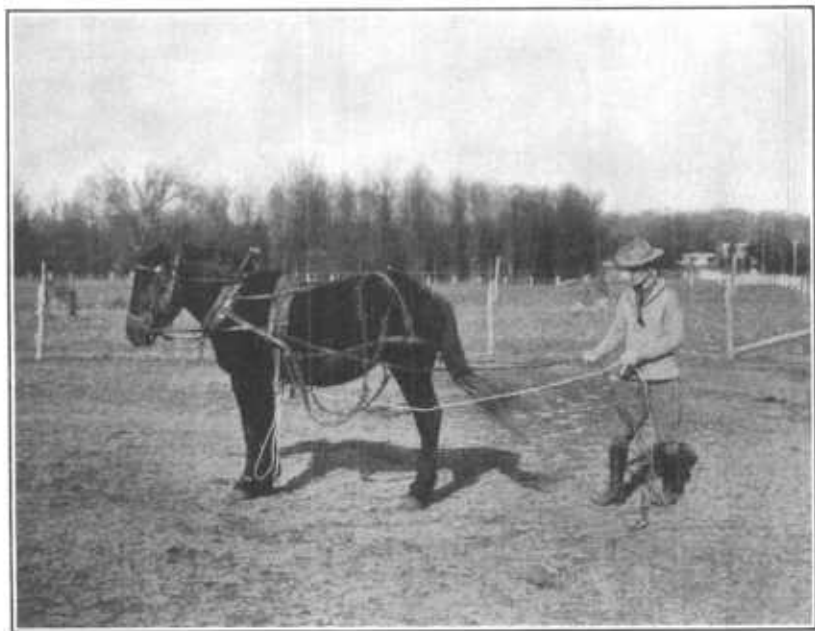


FIG. 7.—Trip ropes.

the consequences of disobedience. There will be clashes, but the horse must be convinced that man is his master. Always, if the horse can not do or be made to do what is asked of him, make him do something else. As long as he is not allowed to do what he himself chooses he will consider man his superior and master.

Never work a colt after he is tired. By heeding this precaution you prevent obstinacy and render him a willing and obedient pupil.

Training should be given in a quiet place, where the colt's attention will not be distracted from the work in hand by other horses or strange surroundings.

Whenever two people are working with a horse they should be on the same side. The horse's attention is then undivided, and if he plunges or kicks he may be controlled with less danger to the trainers.

To harness or saddle a horse it is customary to approach his near or left side, also to mount from the left side.

Never approach a horse without first gaining his attention. Always speak to him before attempting to walk into a stall with him.

BAD HABITS.

Horses that have been properly handled and trained are not balky, neither do they have bad habits. When horses with bad habits



FIG. 8.—Mounting a horse.

are encountered a careful study of each case should be made in order to ascertain the cause, and, if possible, to remove it.

BALKINESS.

The most common cause of balkiness among horses is punishment to make them do something that they can not do or that they do not understand how to do. Another common cause is the forcing of horses to draw heavy loads without allowing them to stop occasionally to rest and regain their breath. The use of the whip or spur in such instances should be avoided, as the pain inflicted will be very likely to provoke further and more stubborn rebellion. If a horse balks the bearing of the harness should be examined to see if it is hurting him. If a heavy load is being drawn and the horse is not

allowed to rest and regain his breath and strength he may become sulky and refuse to pull. Give him a short rest, and while he is resting rub his nose, pick up a front foot and tap the hoof a few times, or adjust the harness, and he may forget his grievance. Take the lines and give the command to go ahead, turning slightly to the right or left to start. If the horse does not start it is either a case of overload or a chronic balker. If the load is so heavy it can not be drawn, unload. If the horse is a chronic balker a course of training will be necessary to overcome the habit.

In older horses where the habit of balking is fixed the horse should be trained to obey all commands with promptness without being hitched to the wagon. First put on the double trip ropes and use them until the horse stops and stands when he hears "whoa." Next put on the guy line, which should be managed by an assistant, while you drive and attend the trip ropes. The guy line is a rope fastened around the horse's neck and a half hitch over the lower jaw. It is very severe and should not be used to excess. If the horse shows any tendency to balk, give the command "whoa" before he stops of his own accord. When ready to start, the assistant should take a position in front of the horse and smartly jerk him forward with the guy line at the same time you give the command "get up." Repeat the process of stopping and starting until the horse shows no signs of self-will. Use the guy line, and use it severely, on the slightest intimation that the horse is going to balk. After a few of these lessons the horse may be hitched to the wagon. The trip ropes and guy line should be kept on until he is well broken of the habit.

KICKING.

A horse that kicks when something touches his heels is dangerous to drive. To overcome the habit, put on the harness and the trip ropes. Take a stick and pole him all over, as described under "Breaking to lead." After he becomes submissive to the pole, tie sacks of hay to the traces and breeching, and continue the lesson until he pays no attention to them.

Fasten a long pole on either side with one end to drag on the ground, the other end to be fastened to the shaft carrier. Drive him around with these, and if he attempts to kick command "steady" and pull him to his knees. The lessons should be continued until he submits to the poles dragging between his legs and all round him. This is a good lesson to give before driving single.

TO THROW A HORSE.

To throw a horse, put on him a surcingle with crupper, with a 2-inch ring fastened in the top of the surcingle. The surcingle and crupper may be made with one piece of rope. Double a 15-foot rope at about one-third its length and slip a 2-inch iron ring over this

doubled portion. Tie a knot in the doubled rope to hold the ring. The loop should be put under the horse's tail for a crupper, and the ends of the rope form a surcingle. The surcingle should fit tight.

When the surcingle and crupper are adjusted take a 20 or 30 foot rope, pass one end through the ring in the backband of the surcingle along the side of the horse's neck, through the ring in the halter, back to the backband, and tie; tie up the front leg on the side on which you desire the horse to fall, the rope from the backband to the halter being on the opposite side. The noseband of the halter should be well down on the horse's nose and fit fairly tight.

Allow the horse to stand for a few minutes, and then with the pulley rope draw his head to one side; he will drop to the knee that

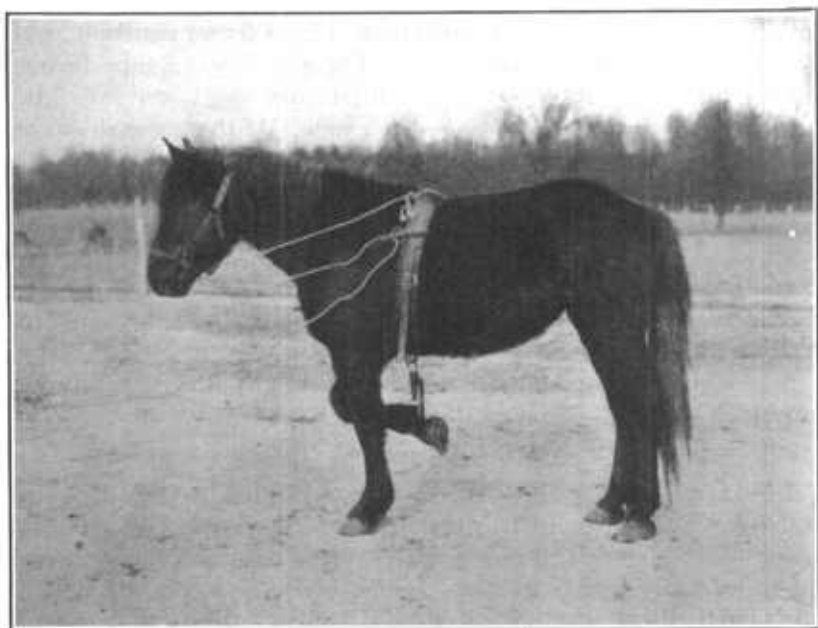


FIG. 9.—Arrangement of ropes to throw a horse.

is tied up and may be easily thrown over on his side. When he tries to get up pull his head to the backband.

Another method is to put straps with rings on the pasterns of the hind feet, tie a loop in the middle of a 40-foot rope, fit the loop on as a collar, running the ends through straps on pasterns, back and through rope collar and out to the side; tie up one front foot. As the horse is backed up his hind feet may be pulled forward with these ropes and he can then be easily thrown on his side.

HARNESS.

Harness should be kept clean and well oiled. It will then be less liable to cause sores on the horses and will last longer. Before the

harness is oiled it should be taken apart and thoroughly washed with soap and water. When nearly dry apply neatsfoot oil with a sponge or a woolen rag. Do not hang harness in heat or in the sun to dry. A tablespoonful of lampblack with 2 ounces of melted beeswax may be added to the oil for a black dressing. Fish oil may be used on harness, or prepared oils may be secured at harness shops. All parts of the harness should be strong.

Every horse should have its own collar, which should fit snugly to the neck from top to bottom. Most sore necks are caused by large collars or by draught being too low on the point of the shoulder. To fit a new or an old collar to a horse soak the collar over night in water, wipe it off in the morning, and fit it on the horse. Work



FIG. 10.—Throwing a horse.

moderately through the day. The collars should be examined every morning and the bearing surface kept clean and smooth. The horse's neck should be kept clean. A good plan in hot weather is to wash it every night with a weak solution of salt water. Keep the collar and hames buckled tight.

Before hitching to a wagon be sure that the neck yoke is safe and that the traces will not become unfastened.

IMPORTANCE OF A GOOD MOUTH.

When we say that a horse has a good mouth we mean that he readily obeys the signals conveyed to him by the reins and bit and that he will also "go up on the bit" in his work without pulling.

A horse is held steady and true in his gait and at all times is under better control when he is "up on the bit."

Always see to it that the bridle on the colt is properly adjusted, and never use a severe bit. The bit should be adjusted in the mouth tight enough so that the rings will not be pulled in, but loose enough so that the corners of the mouth will not be pulled or stretched up. The bit should rest on the bar, above the tushes.

Always train the colt to walk rapidly. There is no gait so valuable and useful in a horse as a rapid walk. It is not difficult to train the



FIG. 11.—Holding a horse down.

average colt to walk fast. From the very beginning keep him walking up to his limit, and he will get into the habit.

When a horse trots make him trot "up on the bit"; he will have a better head and neck carriage, will be less liable to stumble, and will give his attention to the driver.

A colt's mouth may be spoiled by severe bits, by a too tight adjustment of the reins of the biting harness, by tight check reins, by unnecessary jerking and lugging on the lines, or by a poor driver.

Horses for racing, high-stepping carriage horses, and fine saddle horses require special schooling and training, and their development had better be intrusted to the regular trainers.